

TTaT: Love (And Other Indoor Sports)

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Summary: Sequel to 'After Long Years'. When vacations get rained out, things can get very strange indeed.

TTaT: Love (And Other Indoor Sports)

> <meta name="GENERATOR"> Untitled Here we got with a little sequel to 'After Long Years' Despite what the title implies, this story is clean...well, mostly. Very slight bad language but I don't think it will offend. Inspired by an entire month of rain. Yuck. Thanks go to Em, Lyssie, and Lynxie for the betas, Lynxie again for support, and of course, Meghan and Paul, who listened to me whine and didn't kill me for it. The title is courtesy of Threnody, who wrote it in a letter because she thought I'd get a kick out of it.

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Love (And Other Indoor Sports)

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The storm was like the center of an immense battle, the boom of thunder and flash of lightning almost indistinguishable from the roar of explosions and the flash of rockets. A battle with heavy sheets of water that pounded down furiously on the roof as if they had a personal vendetta against the shingles. It was almost deafening in its volume. The shades were drawn up and every sizzling streak of lightening bathed the room in electric blue, illuminating the raven haired, pale skinned figure who lay tangled in the sheets on the bed. Cable paced before the windows, the intensity of the rain disturbing him, keeping him from sleep while his companion dreamed on, blissfully unaware of the chaos of the storm that raged around her.

> He swore under his breath at the fact that a thunderstorm was keeping him awake. And yet, as the static hiss of the rain filled his ears, he couldn't help being a bit unnerved by the sheer power of the

storm that seemed to fill the air with a palpable electric hum. He paced some more. Outside, palms were being whipped to and fro by the strength of the wind, fronds glowing in the brief flashes of light as lightning lanced into the sea. Cannes was getting quite a beating tonight. <br> He turned his back to the windows, trying to fight back the edginess. As tired as he was, he didn't dare lay down again. If he did, he was almost certain to wake Dom up, and that was a thought he did not relish. They might be back on good terms again, but waking her up at two thirty in the morning because he was feeling restless was not high on his list of things to do. Hell, he'd rather face down Apocalypse again. What options did that leave him with? He could try meditation, but he somehow doubted he'd be able to gather sufficient concentration in his present frame of mind. A walk was out of the question; after all, it was the weather that had put him in this situation in the first place. Wasn't the French Riviera supposed to have excellent weather?

> He leaned against the wall and ran a hand back through his hair. Lightning flashed again, followed almost immediately by the roar of thunder. The storm was churning directly overhead now, torrents of water pounding down on the roof of the hotel. The view from the top floor balconies might have been breathtaking, but they left something to be desired in the way of soundproofing. <br> His eyes skimmed once more over Domino's sleeping form, sprawled across the bed with her dark hair falling over her shoulders and face in an ebony cascade. He might have been able to trick himself into thinking she looked innocent and harmless, had he not known that the second those amethyst eyes of hers opened, he'd see that familiar fire blazing behind them. Her whole personality was in those eyes... He shook his head, deciding he needed to stop that train of thought or it was going to plunge him into the realm of hopeless romanticism, and then he'd have to shoot himself. Still, he did appreciate the illusion of peace and serenity.

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Thunder rumbled distantly, the heart of the storm still miles off, she reasoned. Cold rain lashed at her face as she crouched on the darkened rooftop behind the wall three feet in height that ran along the perimeter of the building.

> She methodically checked over the .50 bolt action rifle one more time, the movements fluid with long practiced ease, eyes scanning over the street before her every few seconds. Cold wind blew her wet hair around her face, driving the raindrops like sharp pinpricks against her skin. In the shadows below, something stirred. <p>

She was instantly alert, muscles taught, eyes narrowed, focusing in on the target. The rifle was brought to bear, the figure on the street below placed squarely in the cross hairs of the scope. Her finger tightened on the trigger.

A single deafening clap of thunder split the air in two, jolting her awake. She sat up, dream fading slowly, rubbing at her eyes blearily. "Nate?" Lightning lit the room in a blue blaze and she could feel the thunder that followed vibrating in her ribcage. "Christ. I know they were predicting rain..." She climbed out of the bed, taking the top sheet with her, and walked over to the windows, peering out at the storm. "Pleasant." She turned her back to the window. "I take it you couldn't sleep?" She asked, quirking one eyebrow in an expression that made him want to laugh or grab hold of her and never let go, or both.

He wondered, vaguely, if the storm had gone to his head somehow. Or maybe it was just the overwhelming sense of relief he'd had these last few days- she'd said she'd stay, and she'd kept her word. He could almost imagine that long string of mornings where one or the other of them had woken up alone without so much as a note good-bye were at an end.

> As intoxicating as that prospect was, however, there were still lingering doubts. Could they keep the promises they'd made here, or would their mutually obstinate personalities damn them to failure from the start? <p>

At the moment, it didn't really matter. Here, now, there was nothing but the night, the rain, and Dom clad in nothing but a sheet from the bed. He reached out and pulled her over to him, so that they were both facing the window with its expansive view of the storm. One arm looped loosely around her waist, he began to relax at long last.

Domino leaned her head back against his chest, content to stand there quietly for awhile. Something about his manner made her reluctant to say anything, keeping any sarcastic comments she might have made regarding his mood to herself. "You never answered my question," she said finally.

"The storm," he replied. "Did it wake you up?"

"Not really." She frowned. "It was a dream. Sort of strange actually. That job in Zurich...you remember."

"Hard to forget." Hard to forget she'd almost been killed there. By the time he'd realized it was a setup, she'd already been shot once. He closed his eyes and grimaced as he remembered the sound of her assailant hitting the wet pavement four stories down.

She sensed his uneasiness, a faint shimmering through the link, and wrapped her hand around his own.

"I haven't thought about that one in years. Funny." Another one of those memories she'd locked away, although now that she recalled it, it was crisp and clear, as if it'd been only yesterday. The report of a gun and that lancing pain that had knifed through her the same instant her mind registered the fact that she hadn't fired her weapon. Slick, hot blood pouring from the wound as she backed along the wall, thinking that it was all over...that at long last, her luck had run out.

> He'd saved her then, sending the gunman over the edge of the roof and picking her up carefully. He hadn't left her. Hadn't left her there, or in a dozen other countries scattered across the globe. He'd only failed her once, but she refused to give thought to that old, worn out betrayal. He'd explained his actions and she'd made her peace with it long ago. She shook her head, trying to clear away the myriad of dark remembrances. Nathan's free hand brushed back wayward strands of dark hair from her face. <p>

"What?" He asked.

"Memories," she replied. "We remember too much of the ugly shit life hands us...not enough of the good stuff."

He could sympathize with that, easily, though he realized he probably

only knew a fraction of the ugly events in her past. There was still so little he actually knew about her.

> There was something almost captivating in the way she managed to still be a mystery after all this time. There were some things he knew about her that ordinarily someone would barely note, let alone remember -the name of her favorite nail polish, 'Activation Red,' or what she commonly ordered from the various take-out places they patronized. He didn't know her name (though after such a long time, 'Domino' had ceased to seem abnormal in the slightest) or where she came from...information one normally managed to glean in just a single encounter, let alone over a decade of partnership. Somehow, this lack of any real insight into her past didn't concern him. After all, his own personal history was more than enough for the both of them. But in absence of what most of society would deem 'vital' information, it seemed his mind latched onto whatever trivial fact it came across and clung to it tenaciously like it were a precious pearl. At some point, knowing that her shampoo was balsam scented had become more important than knowing what her father had done for a living. <br>

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She cracked an eye open and glanced out the window. "It's still raining." She rolled over, propping herself up on an elbow and leaning over him, grinning. "Y'know, this means we're going to have to find something to do \_inside.\_"

In an instant, their positions were reversed, his hands on her shoulders, pinning her to the bed. "Is that so?"

"\_Besides\_ that, Summers." She wormed her way out of his grasp and climbed out of the bed, heading toward the bathroom. "I'm taking a shower. Order breakfast...or lunch," she amended, catching sight of the clock.

The coffee was gone, and the breakfast fairly demolished by the time they'd shoved the small table and chairs out to the walls to make room for an impromptu sparring match.

"Come on. You can do better than that," she taunted, ducking low to avoid a punch. "Or are you getting lazy now that you don't have Apocalypse to keep you on your toes?" Amazing she could kid about it now, after so many years of that name conjuring very real images of Cable's death. "I'm not even breaking a sweat here, Nate. What gives?" He was obviously distracted by something.

"You ever think about having kids, Dom?"

"Wha-" Before she could react she found herself unceremoniously dumped on the floor. "Dirty trick, Nate." She flopped backwards on the carpet and looked up at him, eyes narrowed suspiciously. "What made you ask \_that\_ anyway?"

He shrugged. "Didn't know how you felt about it." He lowered himself to the floor next to her. "So?"

"Nathan, 'mom' doesn't exactly fit into my job description."

He shook his head. "Didn't ask if you thought it was practical, just if you'd ever \_thought\_ about it."

She pursed her lips before finally replying. "Sometimes. Enough to know I'd be a miserable parent. Not something I'm prone to pondering often, though." The concept rarely infringed upon her thoughts, and Lord knew she was careful enough to ensure she'd never have to give it serious contemplation. She frowned slightly. "What about you? And we're not bringing Tyler into this, mind you."

He shrugged. "No, guess I hadn't thought about it much."

She rolled over on her stomach, shoving her hair back out of her face. "Besides, I think there are more than enough Summers lurking around as it is." At the distant look on his face, she sighed and pulled herself into a sitting position. "I didn't know you were going to take it that seriously, Nathan. I'm sorry."

"Sorry has no meaning," he replied automatically, and she winced.

"Is this one of those 'sudden lack of a destiny' things? Is that it?"

"Maybe," he admitted.

She nodded slowly. "Well, okay. Think of it like this. Can you really see either of us retiring to parenthood? I mean, sure, rug rats are cute and all, but they need full time attention. As it is I couldn't trust myself to keep a houseplant alive. What would I do with a kid?"

"Probably manage to be a terrific mother."

"Your opinion doesn't count. You're partial." She stood and began dragging the furniture back to its correct places. "Thanks for the vote of confidence anyway."

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"If I had a pair of scissors, I could make this fit."

"You're not cutting up my puzzle pieces, Dom." He reached over and grabbed the piece from her hand and stuck it into the half finished jigsaw of Paris at night.

"I hate these things," she scowled. "You know I hate jigsaw puzzles, Nate."

"Because you have the attention span of a four year old."

"Oh, shut up."

"Ow! What was that for?"

"For being a smartass. Why couldn't you have gotten some other game?"

"The gift store was all out of battleship," he deadpanned, not looking up from the puzzle.

"You cheat at battleship anyway."

"And you don't?"

She smirked. "At least I don't go poking around in peoples' heads to see where their pieces are."

"I've never done that."

"Riiiiiight." She picked up a piece and stuck it at random into the puzzle, not terribly surprised when it fit. "Ha! Got one."

"That makes a grand total of three?"

"Oh, shut up."

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"Haven't you finished that thing yet?" She asked, looking up from the gun that was currently in pieces on the floor before her.

"No," came his reply from the table. She sighed and crossed the room to stand behind his chair. She stared down at the almost-finished puzzle.

"Let's go to dinner. I'm going stir crazy in here."

"You never could sit still for more than half an hour," her replied.

"Well, some things never change," she replied wryly. "I'm going to go change. If you're not ready when I come back, I'll go to dinner by myself." She strode back across the room, paused to bend down and pick up a rag to wipe the grease off her hands, and vanished into the large bathroom with her bag.

> With a sigh, he stood from his chair, stretched the stiffness from his joints, and went to find the only suit he'd brought with him for this 'vacation.' His eyes drifted over to the gun she'd been working on, scattered there on the carpet. They'd been here for two weeks, trying to play tourist (and probably failing miserably), managing not to fight by pointedly avoiding talk of what would happen when their little getaway was over. His gaze stayed locked on the weapon, as if it could somehow give him the answers. It sat there, blithely ignoring him, a shining, deadly symbol of all that she was, of all that he himself had become in his years pursuing his destiny. It taunted him, asking him if he thought things could ever really change. <br> With a muttered curse, he tore his eyes away and retrieved his suit from the wardrobe.

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The restaurant was filled with other hotel guests trying to amend for a day spoilt by the bad weather, busy enough that no one gave them a second glance as they took a small table near the back of the room. The atmosphere had a slightly pretentious feel to it, a piano playing softly on the other side of the room, perfectly calculated mood lighting all orchestrated to cater to an ideal that was meant to please tourists.

She was leaned across the table, glass of wine in one hand, the other toying with the corner of her napkin, relating a story she knew he'd heard before because she also knew he wasn't paying attention.

> She always managed to be the same, he thought, whether she was wrapped in plum colored silk or wearing her ripped uniform, caked with mud. She never made an attempt to be anyone but herself around

him, maybe because she was so tired of hiding behind false faces, maybe because she'd learned the hard way that keeping herself a mystery only ended up hurting everyone in the long run. Or maybe she'd just accepted the fact that he saw right through her facades anyway. And, of course, the same held true on his end of things. It wasn't that she was presenting herself as an open book; far from it. She was as secretive now as she'd ever been. <p>

As dinner came and went, the conversation stayed mostly superficial, though it didn't bother either of them. Dishes were cleared away, drinks finished, and finally it was just the two of them sitting there.

She smiled mischievously at him. "Let's go for a walk."

"It's still raining," he pointed out.

"So what? Afraid you're going to rust, Nate?"

"More concerned that you're going to ruin that dress."

"A dress is a dress," she shrugged. "Right now, I want to go get utterly soaked in a rainstorm with you." She got up from her chair. "Come on."

He shook his head ruefully but stood and followed her from the restaurant.

The beach was, not surprisingly, deserted as they walked along the shoreline, rain still beating down steadily. After ten minutes, they'd been completely drenched, so he didn't take much notice of the rain anymore. He had to admit, it wasn't bad at all. Despite the rain, the air was still warm, and the gentle hiss of the falling drops masked the sounds of the traffic that might have drifted from the city. despite the proximity of the hotel, and the faint glow coming from its multitude of windows, the beach seemed isolated, as if it had been muffled by a layer of dark fabric that excluded it from the rest of the universe. Domino stood at the edge of the water, her eyes scanning the dark horizon as if searching for something, as if she could peer through the night, past the distant coast of Africa, past the Earth itself. He was tempted to ask her what it was she was looking for, if it was something tangible, or merely a part of herself she'd lost somewhere along the broken road of her life. What was more, he wanted to help her find it, whatever it was.

"Nathan?" She turned back and looked at him, an errant flash of lighting far out at sea throwing a wash of blue over her pale skin, illuminating the puzzled look on her face.

He walked to her, shoes sinking into the wet sand. Dom's shoes lay discarded several feet behind him, tossed away with a muttered vocalization of her dislike of high heals and a further rationalization that it was impossible to wear them in the sand anyway.

"What?" He asked, responding to the still slightly bewildered expression stamped across her face. She seemed far away at that moment, lost... he could almost see, lurking somewhere far down in a part of herself that was walled and topped off with razor wire, a

scared little girl with amethyst eyes seeking desperately for reassurance.

"I thought you'd said something." She replied and shook her head, a shower of water droplets scattering from her wet hair. "Never mind." She looked back out to sea.

From his position slightly behind her, he followed her gaze into the darkness and was drawn backward in time, his mind retracing her nightmare through the labyrinthine years until it was that rainy night in Zurich again with thunder rumbling distantly and the rain drumming down, a tight feeling in his chest as he tried to reach her. Then the sharp crack of a gunshot, the wrong gunshot, and the need to move faster. It was a blur until the gunman was gone and he was pulling her up from the roof, her blood spilling in a crimson torrent.

> He jerked out of the recollection, distancing himself from the clarity that marked a telepath's memory. His hand closed on her shoulder, a silent reassurance that she was here. She turned and her eyes met his, still questioning, but no longer desperate and lost.

"I'm soaked. Let's go." <br>

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"Well, not a total waste of a day," she commented, with a mischievous smile, wringing rainwater out of her hair.

"No," he agreed. Outside, the heavy clouds had begun to roll away and slivers of silver moonlight shone down on the beach, glowing on the slick palm fronds and shallow puddles below.

"Sure, now it stops raining." She rolled her eyes in irritation.  
"After we get soaked to the skin." She leaned back against him and he put an arm around her shoulders.

"It was your idea," he reminded. They stood there, lovers by definition, yes, but more old friends, complete in their understanding of one another despite so much the each kept private and locked away from all eyes, kept private even from themselves. Friends that had committed to memory the other's map of scars, though the causes were not always known. A shared past, despite their differences, a shared sense of how precious this peace was, the inescapable knowledge that it could shatter like an overturned vase, leaving them to rebuild the precarious hose of cards with the razor edged remains. A shared need to deny this knowledge for just a few hours more before the sun rose glaringly on the world and made it unavoidable.

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End  
file.